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ON THE COVER:
WEXLER'S



An appetite for autumn

Man (and woman) cannot live on PBR and pasta alone. I should know. I spent the whole summer trying. But now that my leftover Burning Man groceries are gone and the weather's getting colder, I can't help but crave real food again. And what better time and place is there to be really, really hungry for a substantial meal made with fresh ingredients than right now in San Francisco? Despite the struggling economy, innovative restaurants keep popping up — and the old classics are offering better deals. Plus, the changing culinary landscape has led to all kinds of fun, cheap, gourmet alternatives like pop-ups, lunch carts, and temporary restaurants-within-a-restaurant. This edition of FEAST, our drinking and dining

magazine, focuses on what we love about the Bay Area's food scene, from innovative locales to cross-cultural alternatives, from wintery suppers to summery desserts (after all, how cold does it ever really get here?), and from new restaurants to a niche bookstore that only a foodie-city like San Francisco could support. Whether you're ready to start your Thanksgiving feasting early or are simply transitioning out of your warm-weather diet (or budget), we're sure you'll find something in the coming pages to satisfy your cravings. Unless, that is, you're looking for PBR and pasta. You'll have to take care of that one on your own — or wait 'til next summer. **SFBG**

Molly Freedenberg
FEAST editor

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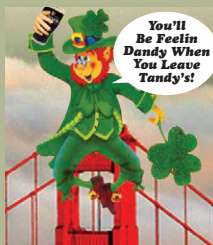
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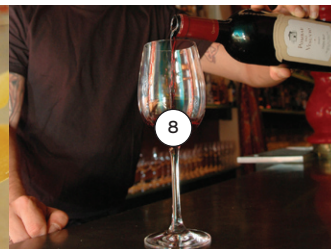
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FEAST

— FALL 2009 —



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4 fine wine bars



10 latest, greatest openings



A readable feast



6 supper-worthy soups



4 phenomenal falafels



6 innovative ice creams

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6 pop-up lunches

Blame the economy's downturn. Or blame the Tamale Lady's success. Whatever the reason, suddenly mobile food carts seem to be all the rage — and those that serve the midday (rather than midnight) crowd all the more so. But while the idea of the Crème Brûlée Man and Magic Curry Cart has gone from experimental to expected, another nontraditional lunch option has bubbled to the surface: pop-ups and dining windows. These more stationary — yet equally delightful — options have been sneaking onto industrial loading docks or into neighborhood supermarkets, seducing customers with their unconventional locales and keeping their loyalty with indisputably good food.

(Megan Gordon)

KITCHENETTE SF

Douglas Monsalud and his crew

started serving “spontaneous, organic, covert nourishment” out of a loading dock less than nine months ago, and the Dogpatch lunch scene hasn't been the same since. The weekday eatery features a thoughtful, rotating menu of inspired delights, always including a few sandwiches, a salad, a dessert (recent choices include bacon snickerdoodles and a nectarine/raspberry galette), and a housemade beverage (like honeydew/lime fresca or organic lemonade). Not only is everything delicious, most items are made from locally-grown ingredients. My favorite? Marin Sun Farms' pork schnitzel sandwich with braised cabbage and pink lady apples, a butterscotch cookie, and organic strawberry soda with local seltzer.

Weekdays, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.;
958 Illinois, SF.

www.kitchenettesf.com

LITTLE SKILLET

Leave it to the Bay Area to host a joint that pairs fried chicken and waffles with farm-fresh, organic ingredients. This offshoot of Farmer Brown draws the in-the-know lunch crowd down to SoMa for crispy fried poultry, creamy grits and cheddar, angel biscuits and gravy, and red velvet cupcakes. For you old-school beverage aficionados, they stock Dublin Doctor Pepper (the original Doctor Pepper from Texas, made with real cane sugar), Fitz's cream sodas, and Faygo grape soda. After ordering from the little blue shuttered window, wait across the street on the funky concrete loading dock until you hear your name. Then, perched on milk crates with other soul-food seekers, you'll get your Southern charm with SF values.

Mon.–Sat., 9 a.m.–3:30 p.m.;
360 Ritch, SF. (415) 777-2777,
www.littleskilletsf.com

NAKED LUNCH

Ian Begg and Ryan Maxey (formerly of Café Majestic) opened the door to Naked Lunch in mid-August. The sweet little annex to Enrico's features a menu that changes almost daily, although the signature foie gras sandwich will probably remain a fixture (controversy or not). At \$15, it's outside my tax bracket, but the dried chorizo sandwich with bacon, d'anjou pear, pickled onion, and baby greens was pure perfection — the salt from the bacon balanced with the sweetness of the pear. Ian and Ryan have plans to open a gastropub. For now, I'm just happy they're rockin' the sandwich combinations each week.

Mon.–Fri., 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m.;
504 Broadway, SF. (415) 577-4951,
www.nakedlunchsf.com

AMERICAN BOX

American Box, brought to us by the folks at Fish and Farm (inside Hotel Mark Twain), offers more than simple sandwiches and beverages. From the now infamous Juicy Lucy's cheeseburger box, served with local organic potato salad and secret sauce, to the Niman Ranch taco box with sweet and spicy slaw, chef Chad

Newton's Tenderloin pop-up cuisine is attracting curious foodies along with the neighborhood business crowd. Take your box to go or meander across the hotel lobby and enjoy a quiet spell in the dining room. There's nothing like a very grown-up lunch box to put a smile on your face — even if Mom didn't pack it for you.

Weekdays, 10:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.;
339 Taylor, SF. (415) 474-3474,
www.americanboxlunch.com

SAIGON SANDWICH

No one seems to mind squeezing into this hole-in-the-wall Tenderloin spot for an authentic \$3 banh mi sandwich. It must be because of the sweet roasted pork on a chewy roll, served with pickled daikon, carrots, jalapenos, and cilantro. The two efficient women who run the counter aren't messing around, though, so don't hem and haw before you order — and don't even think about making any special requests or alterations. Instead, quietly grab a pork bun or coconut dessert to accompany your sandwich and move along to make room for the next guy in line.

Mon.–Sat., 6 a.m.–6 p.m.;
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YATS NEW ORLEANS ORIGINAL POBOYS

You tell me where in SF you can get an authentic po'boy with red beans and rice in the back of a dive bar, and I'll buy you a beer. Really. Otherwise I'll bet money the only place is at Jack's Club, a neighborhood bar that's already fab thanks to a pool table, a CD jukebox, and vintage pinball machines. But head to the back and you'll find a little window that pumps out real Southern goodness to the San Francisco masses. The Debris sandwich (pulled roast with gravy) is my favorite, although the rustic gumbo with smoked sausage, seafood, and chicken is a close second.

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4 fine wine bars

It's time to quit your drinking habit. No, not *that* one. The one where you sidle up to your usual bar and say, "I'll have a glass of cabernet (or chardonnay or merlot)" with nary a glance at the wine list. I know, I know. You're tired. You had a long day. But there's a big world of wine out there, and lucky for you, we live in a city with *lots* of delightful options by the glass, from Down Under stickies to the reds of the Med. Here are four places that specialize in remarkable vinos, so it's easy to trade in that mediocre merlot for a truly vinaceous adventure.

(Amy Monroe)

LA GITANE

If you think sherry is only for the likes of Niles and Frasier Crane, La Gitane will change your mind in three sips. Order the tasting of three 1.5-ounce pours (\$14) — a light, briny Fino; a tangy, citrus-y Amontillado; and a rich and smoky Oloroso — wines that are stunningly dry but richly flavored (and, at 19 percent to 20 percent alcohol, not at all demure). If you sit at the bar, chances are a charming barman (they all seem to be men here) will pour you a little education along with your wine — in the form of a brief but enthusiastic tutorial of grape varieties and the Solera system (the special process of aging and blending sherry). Find yourself wanting more? You're in luck: La Gitane offers 20 different sherries by the glass (\$6–\$18), including a couple of sweet styles and a half-dozen or so sherry-based cocktails (\$7–\$11).

6 Claude Lane, SF. (415) 788-6686, www.gitanerestaurant.com

SOUTH FOOD AND WINE BAR

Quick, name an Australian wine. If you said "Yellow Tail," you're not alone. Due to the ubiquity of that single brand, it's easy to believe that everything that

comes out of the country-that-is-a-continent is a \$5 shiraz.

Not so. The proof is in the glass at South, where the focus is on the food and wine of Australia and New Zealand. Sure, you can order shiraz, but there are far more interesting things to be sipped here. A glass of Peter Lehmann Semillon (\$7) might sound intimidating, given that it's a grape you've probably never heard of, but its crisp grapefruit and lemon zest flavors make it a lovely aperitif. More of a red drinker? New Zealand produces pinot noirs that blow most of their California counterparts out of the water. Try St. Clair Vicar's Choice (\$10) from Marlborough; a bold, spicy petit verdot from Victoria (\$8); or an iced Riesling from Tasmania (\$13) that's a dead ringer for a honey-dipped apricot. South makes it easy to try them all at its happy hour, weekdays from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m., when all wines are \$6.

330 Townsend, SF. (415) 974-5599, www.southfwb.com

YIELD WINE BAR

It's easy to make yourself at home at this Dogpatch wine bar, either on one of the leather couches arranged around low butcher block tables or at one of the half-dozen barstools lined along the simple wooden bar. Indeed, stepping through the door at Yield feels a bit like entering a friend's loft: cozy, relaxed, and well-designed. But beyond atmosphere, what really makes this wine bar special is its menu. Every wine is organic, biodynamic, or sustainably farmed, and every dish on the concise list of small plates is vegetarian. The wine menu changes frequently and includes familiar varieties (sauvignon blanc, syrah, cabernet) as well as more esoteric offerings like the Domaine de Reuilly Rosé of Pinot Gris (\$11) — a pale pink, crisp wine with delicate flavors of strawberry and orange zest



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CHARLES RUSSO

— or the Tenuta Pederzana Lambrusco (\$11) — a fun, sparkling red from Emilia Romana, Italy. Really want to roll the dice? Opt for the never-know-what-you're-going-to-get carafe special (\$10), offered weekdays from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.

2490 Third St., SF. (415) 401-8984, www.yieldsf.com

ZARÉ AT FLYTRAP

The bar at Zaré at Flytrap is impressive for three reasons: its warm and talented bar staff; its well-edited, Mediterranean-influenced wine list; and its truly affordable happy hour. You won't find an over-the-top cabernet or run-of-the-mill merlot here. Instead the wine

menu invites you to delve into the beguiling wines of Spain, Portugal, the south of France — even Lebanon. That's right, Lebanese wine. Which you should try. Why? Because Chateau Musar's "Hochar" (\$12) is a smoky, earthy, elegant blend of cabernet, carignan, and cinsault that could easily be mistaken for a fine Bordeaux. Plus, if you come around during a weekday happy hour (4:00 to 6:00 p.m.), all wines by the glass are \$5, making it that much easier to take a chance. 606 Folsom, SF. (415) 243-0580, www.zareflytrap.com **SF86**

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10 latest, greatest openings

There's been plenty of activity in the world of food in the last few years, especially in San Francisco. Street food madness reached an all-time high, spawning festivals and an array of carts, trucks, and stands from established and new chefs. Pop-up restaurants appeared in cafes, backrooms, and undisclosed locations. Overall, prices actually went down (while quality remained high) and deals proliferated. (See ... economic news isn't all bad.) There also have plenty of top-notch restaurant, café, and bar openings. Here are a few of our favorites. (Virginia Miller)

KAPPOU GOMI

From beginning to end, dinner at this new Outer Richmond District eatery is a thrill. With most small plates from the novel-length menu (grouped by fish, meat, and veggie) hovering under \$10, it's easy to have a feast for as little or as much as you want to spend. Plus, the offerings aren't the usual bento-or-sushi fare Americans have come to expect from Japanese cuisine. You'll hardly recognize the tempura, covered here in various nuts and grains. Pork belly in aromatic broth is a revelation. And butter-grilled scallops are so good you'll want two orders. Don't bother asking too many questions unless you speak Japanese. Fortunately, you won't need to: everything is fantastic.

5524 Geary, SF. (415) 221-5353

TONY'S PIZZA NAPOLETANA

Even before opening this North Beach café, owner and nine-time World Pizza Champion Tony Gemignani was famous for his world class pies. We can see why. We love the classic Margherita (\$18), which won the 2007 World Pizza Cup in Naples, Italy. But what's really stellar is the Cal Italia (\$18), Gold Medal

winner of Food Network's Pizza Champions Challenge. Made from imported Italian ingredients, like all Gemignani's pizzas, this one's covered in four cheeses (asiago, mozzarella, Gorgonzola, and fresh Parmesan), then salted with prosciutto di Parma and sweetened with an aged balsamic drizzle and fig preserve. Not feeling the pizza pie vibe? Tony's also offers pasta, a range of antipasti options, and a full bar — all in a sophisticated setting. 1570 Stockton, SF. (415) 835-9888, tonypizzanapoletana.com

CONTIGO

A true taste of Spain isn't easy to come by in these parts. Sure, there are tons of "tapas" joints serving small plates of Mediterranean-inspired fare, but finding the delicately-prepared, authentic dishes that go so well with Spanish and Portuguese wines is more of a challenge. Thanks to Brett Emerson, though, the search has gotten easier. Contigo's chef and owner pays homage to his time in Catalonia with gorgeous sardine dishes (served a number of ways, including on toast with chickpea puree or alongside blood oranges and beet relish), crowd-pleasing croquetas de bacalao (salt cod fritters), and a range of imported jamons (aged anywhere from 12 to 36 months). Also delightful (and delightfully authentic) is the choice of coques — or Catalan flatbreads — available with rapini and caramelized onions, anchovies, Txistorra sausage, or a Marin Sun Farm egg. A cozy, heated back patio, vegetable garden, and modern but rustic space add to the culinary charm. 1320 Castro, SF. (415) 285-0250, www.contigosf.com

WEXLER'S

Spanking fresh minimalist interior meets urban BBQ and American food in this one-of-a-kind FiDi



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY PAT MAZZERA

restaurant, which opened this June. Whether you're enjoying a Scotch egg to start (\$11), chicken sandwich (\$12) with creamy coleslaw at lunch, a satisfying dinner of slow-roasted smoked sturgeon with lobster, cornbread cakes and parsnip mash (\$21) or a dessert of inside-out root beer float with house-made vanilla soda and Humphry Slocombe ice cream (\$6), you're guaranteed a chic downtown meal that simultaneously manages to be feel down-home. Best of all? Wexler's serves a mean mint julep.

568 Sacramento, SF. (415) 983-0102, www.wexlerssf.com

FARM : TABLE

One of my two favorite cafe openings of the year is this postcard-sized spot in the TenderNob. I was drawn in by the beautifully bitter espressos, strong cappuccinos, and other finely prepared coffees from Verve Coffee Roasters in Santa Cruz. But it's the baked goods and organic lunch items that'll keep me coming back. Unless

you follow the friendly staff on Twitter, you never know what'll be on the menu — offerings could be anything from apricot bread pudding to sloppy joes. But there's never a question that it will be good. Plus the welcoming, relaxed atmosphere will encourage you to stay and lounge, whether it's at a communal table inside, sidewalk seating, or near the picturesque (and usually open) window.

754 Post, SF. (415) 292-7089, www.farmtablesff.com

LITTLE SKILLET

You may have already heard about the chicken and waffles proffered from a window in an alley from the folks who brought us Farmer Brown. But it's the Southern/New Orleans-influenced specials (all under \$10) that get me going. In particular are the grits: usually the right mix of savory with a hint of sweet, with additions like cheese, andouille sausage, and a touch of maple syrup or bacon, brown sugar, and pecans.

Worth noting too are the po'boy sandwiches, which come loaded with changing specials of shrimp, sausage, eggs, and more.
360 Ritch, SF. (415) 777-2777,
www.littleskilletsf.com

HOLLOW

Is it a coincidence that my other favorite new café is also tiny? Maybe. Or maybe there's something inherently charming about a lovely little spot that only a handful of people can enjoy at a time. Either way, I'm delighted by this Sunset District purveyor of coffee and garden/home décor items. The java (from Ritual Coffee) is prepared with finesse and delicious alongside delicate truffles and baked goods. The staff is friendly. And thanks to the owner's interior design training, the low-ceilinged, narrow space is a visual wonderland worthy of Victorian poetry or J.R.R. Tolkien.

1435 Irving, SF. (415) 242-4119

SHOWDOGS

With sausage slingers making

appearances all over the city, perhaps we should declare 2009 the "Year of the Dog." There's the delightful Zog's Dogs in FiDi. Among my favorite mobile offerings are Ryan Farr's, which he serves some Sundays outside Elixir and Thursdays at the Ferry Plaza farmers market. True, Rosamunde Sausage Grill is a reliable classic, but my vote for best new dog restaurant is Showdogs. Brave the trek to the less-popular stretch of Market Street next to the Golden Gate Theater to be rewarded with fine beers on tap (available in 4-, 8-, and 16-ounce pours) and dogs showcasing the Bay Area's best sausage and hot dog makers (including Farr's 4505 Meats). There's something for everyone — classic, lemon chicken, Louisiana hot link, a crispy (and huge) corn dog, duck sausage with kimchi, and even a boudin noir — and none cost more than \$8.50. The only way to improve a Showdog meal is to include a

CONTINUES ON PAGE 12 »



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ARLENE ROMANA

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RN74

Openings **cont.**

side of buttermilk onion rings (\$4).
1020 Market, SF. (415) 558-9560,
www.showdogssf.com

SCHMIDT'S

There's never quite enough German food around, especially now that we're losing long-timer, Schnitzlhaus, leaving us with the fabulous but few: Suppenküche and Walzwerk. That is, until the gracious (and smart) owners of Walzwerk opened this new spot in the Mission District. A casual deli with German groceries for sale, German beers on tap, and a spare, beer-hall feel to the clean dining room, this spot provides everything you need for your own mini Oktoberfest (minus the lederhosen). Best of all, their spaetzle, sauerkraut, and house-made sausages are even better than Mom would make, with prices generally under \$12. Specials like veal schnitzel also make their way onto the menu, along

with baked goods from Esther's German Bakery in Mountain View. *Guten appetit!*
2400 Folsom, SF. (415) 401-0200,
www.schmidts-sf.com

RN74

No one can argue with RN74's stunning 3,000-plus wine list, thanks to sommelier par excellence, Rajat Parr. Some argue with the food — or rather, the price for “wine bar” fare — but foodies know this as a metropolitan restaurant with a wine focus (highlighted by the French train station sign showcasing available bottles). I posit that the food completes the picture. Whether you keep it simple in the bar with a glass of wine and creamy, lemon-smoked sturgeon rillettes on toast (\$9), or you splurge for a bottle and a dinner of silky foie gras terrine (\$22), or succulent grilled Maine sea scallops (\$29), there's no question you'll feel indulgent. **SFBG**

301 Mission, SF. (415) 543-7474,
www.michaelmina.net/rn74

A readable feast

Q&A with Celia Sacks of Omnivore Books

By Megan Gordon

In the age of the Kindle, who gets excited about actual *books* anymore? If response to Omnivore Books is any indication, the answer is: foodies. At a recent Frank Bruni reading, people were lined up outside Celia Sack's new Noe Valley shop, clamoring for a peek. And at her first pie contest, 48 folks entered, 80 judges tasted, and everyone left happy. All the excitement may sound like something only a big-box bookstore or corporate-sponsored festival could pull off, but it's clear the former pet food purveyor has struck a nerve with her delightful little niche shop. Since it opened last November, the shop has attracted high-profile chefs, prolific writers, food personalities, and activists ready to immerse themselves in a petite enclave of local food culture, along with foodies looking for a cookbook or a rare collectors' item. A high point for Sacks? Introducing Michael Pollan and Alice Waters in the same week. So how did Sacks create such a uniquely popular community space where old books, new books, and farm fresh eggs commingle? We popped in to meet the proprietor and find out.

SFBG Tell me about how the bookstore came to be.

Celia Sacks I worked at Noe Valley Pet Company on the corner with my partner, Paula. The idea for the bookstore came to be after the space next door opened up one day. We jumped on it, knowing we wanted it for something, just not sure for what.

SFBG So why the niche bookstore?

CS It's really my collecting interest. I love books on food. I really love books on the trade: how to open your own bakery, meat shop, how to run it. I love the

aesthetics of them. It's such an interesting look-back at history.

But I soon realized I'm not going to make it by just selling older books. There's this bookstore in Portland, Maine, called Rablelais. I met the owners, and they sell new and old. It all came together for me at that point. For example, the owner had an organic farming book from 1948 next to something by Michael Pollan. I realized that when you have new books alongside old books, you can get people who aren't even collectors excited about collecting.

SFBG How do you envision your shop as part of the community?

CS First, the events really give people something to do. Noe Valley is quiet, and the area is really lacking in culture in a lot of ways — except for music and, of course, City Arts and Lectures. But it's nice to offer the community something to do. And it's such a foodie city! The events have brought in a lot of chefs and local food personalities.

SFBG We noticed you're on Twitter. Has it helped you reach out to the community in new ways?

CS I'm the perfect person to ask, actually, because I'm so not tech-savvy. But it's a great way to connect if you write well. It's obviously an important tool for marketing, but I like to blend personal writing within that. Sometimes I do certain contests over Twitter, offering extra copies of a book or advance proofs.

SFBG What's been most popular at the shop recently?

CS The *Gastronomica* issue featuring Julia Child is pretty big. Also, *A Platter of Figs*, *The Art of Simple Food*, *A16 Food and Wine*,



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CHARLES RUSSO

and *In Defense of Food*. All local authors!

SFBG How do you find all the amazing rare stuff you carry?

CS Some of it online, book dealers, antiquarian book fairs — I'll often get referred to an estate. I used to work at a rare book auction house, and they sometimes refer people to me.

SFBG What are your favorite cookbooks or food writers?

CS *Zuni Café Cookbook* is probably my favorite. But I also love *Sunday Suppers at Lucques* — similar in a lot of ways. And of course, *Roast Chicken and Other Stories*. The nice thing about the Zuni book is that Judy Rodgers actually teaches you why you're doing what you're doing. The other night, I made her recipe for chicken braised in honey, vinegar and figs — amazing.

SFBG How much has the declining economy affected your business at the shop?


CS I love opening in a recession:

there's nowhere to go but up. I'm not worried. If I have a bad day, I have to remind myself of the big picture and know that later in the week I'll have a good day, too. **SFBG** Omnivore Books, 3885 Cesar Chavez, SF. (415) 282-4712, omnivorebooks.com

UPCOMING (MOSTLY FREE) EVENTS

Oct. 31, 4–5 p.m. Julie Usher, author of *Cookie Swap*
Nov. 1, 3–4 p.m. Pim Techamuanwitt, author of *The Foodie Handbook*
Nov. 6, 6–7 p.m. Jaden Hair, author of *The Steamy Kitchen: 101 Asian Recipes Simple Enough for Tonight's Dinner*
Nov. 8, 3–4 p.m. Andrea Israel & Nancy Garfinkle, authors of *The Recipe Club: A Tale of Food and Friendship*
Nov. 21, 4–5 p.m. \$5: Pumpkin cooking contest. Bring any pumpkin dish (from cookies to mole) and let everyone judge. Winner splits the door fee with Omnivore.

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6 supper-worthy soups

Take almost any kid to the grocery store and their favorite place is likely the candy aisle. Me? I salivated in front of the soups. All those colorful cans promising savory combinations of belly-warming meat and veggies caught my childhood fancy, no matter the season in my temperate hometown of San Diego. Back then, the decision always was between hearty beef barley, comforting chicken noodle, and more-fun-than-tasty alphabet soup. Now my palate has matured — but

my taste for a brothy meal in a bowl has not. I still consider the greatest dining find to be a liquid lunch with ingredients so fresh and seasonings so rich that ordering a “proper” entrée is superfluous.

(Sarah C. Jiménez)

LA TAQUERIA MENUDO

If you're looking for a traditional Mexican stew (or just a fantastic hangover cure) in a hipster-free environment, head out of the sunny, skinny-jeaned Mission District and into the fog

of the Excelsior. There, at La Taqueria Menudo, you can find a steaming bowl of perfectly spicy pozole. (Similar to menudo, minus the creepy surprises of tripe — or Ricky Martin). This under-appreciated neighborhood joint serves the classic dish with plump hominy and pork so tender it comes apart when you stab it with your spoon. The dish is traditionally served with cabbage and radishes, but La Taqueria serves it with limes, cilantro, onions, and chile de arbol. No matter. The spicy depth of the soup's flavor unravels in so many layers, and the accompanying tortillas are always so warm and soft, that those deviations get lost in the mist.

4591 Mission, SF. (415) 333-8604

SOUP FREAKS

Overall reviews of this mini-chain are mixed, but we love this company's dedication to organic ingredients and free-range, hormone-free meat. And say what you will about any of the other soups, the chili here is transcendent. Made with four different types of beans, fresh tomatoes, and bell peppers with a bit of crunch, this cold-weather classic is satisfying year-round.

90 New Montgomery, SF.
(415) 369-9602; 1900 Powell,
Emeryville. (610) 601-7687;
www.soupfreaks.com

LA MEDITERRANEE

It may be rare to get San Francisco days so sweltering you need chilled soup to counter them. But La Mediterranee's cold cucumber soup is worth ordering whatever the weather. The cool blend of fresh fruit (cucumber is one, you know) and warm garlic melds perfectly with the creamy yogurt base, proving bright enough for an Indian summer lunch and dense enough for a nippy autumn supper.

2210 Fillmore, SF. (415) 921-2956;
288 Noe, SF. (415) 431-7210; 2936
College, Berkeley. (510) 540-7773,
www.cafelamed.com

SUPPENKÜCHE

It's easy to assume that all German cuisine is bland and heavy, particularly dishes like potato soup. But the kartoffelsuppe at Hayes Valley's Suppenküche proves that central European food can be hearty without inducing a heart attack — or a born-of-boredom nap. The thick, savory, beef-based stew may warm your belly, but the balance of spice and starch is delicate enough to delight the palate of diners who've never set foot in München or Milwaukee.

525 Laguna, SF. (415) 252-9289,
www.suppenkuche.com

BURMA SUPERSTAR

Made from a mix of samusas, falafel, cabbage, and fried potatoes, the samusa soup at this Richmond District eatery might sound like the last stop for wayward leftovers, but this thick, salted delight is the reason many diners make the trek to Clement Street in the first place. Indeed, this stewed version of the popular eatery's varied specialties is so good you might be inspired to skip the next course altogether.

309 Clement, SF. (415) 387-2147,
www.burmasuperstar.com

SAN FRANCISCO SOUP COMPANY

SF Soup Company may seem to be everywhere, but it's an entirely local enterprise. Even better, it has found a way to take tomato soup — the dreaded accompaniment to the ubiquitous grilled cheese sandwich of childhood — far beyond its boring, watery reputation. The secret? Combining the sweet acidity of the native South American plant with savory basil in an organic, creamy base. Add in the choice of wheat or french bread and you've got a delicious, healthy meal option wherever you are in the city.

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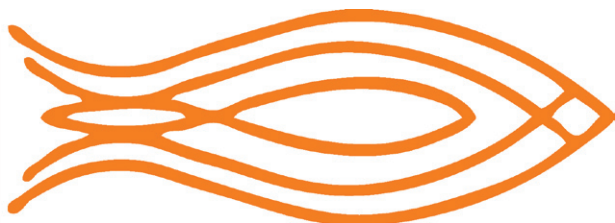
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GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CHARLES RUSSO

4 phenomenal falafels

Falafel — those delightful deep-fried chickpea (or sometimes fava bean) balls — could quite possibly be the perfect food. It spans cultures: Originally a fasting food from Egypt, falafel became popular in the Middle East, was adopted by Jewish immigrants to Palestine, and is now a favorite fast food internationally. It spans food preferences: vegetarians like the protein-packed nutrition;

omnivores like the crunchy/chewy texture. And, when combined in a pita with vegetables and hummus, yogurt, or tahini, the highly portable sandwich combo spans locations. Here are some of our favorite places to get these diverse delights.

(Kristen Haney)

OASIS GRILL

If you find yourself hungry for a quick, tasty lunch or dinner in the FiDi, skip the high-end

sandwich shops and head to this unassuming Mediterranean eatery. The tiny grab-and-go spot (there's only room for two people, or one very large one, to sit down), is the perfect place to get spicy falafel with fresh veggies with a generous helping of tahini and hummus, all wrapped in a thin, soft lavash bread. The only thing more impressive than the falafel — that owner Mohammed not only miraculously manages to remember your order, but to find you amid the throngs of people packed into the tiny shop like a rush hour BART train.

91 Drumm, SF. (415) 781-0313, www.sfoasisgrill.com

LIBA

The folks behind Liba — whose name means romance/love in several languages including Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian — want you to fall in love with their falafel, and you'll be hard-pressed to resist. The courtship starts with the exterior

of this adorable mobile lunch spot: mint green paint, swirly lettering, and potted plants are smart and inviting. Next, Liba reels you in with organic, local, natural ingredients and an environmentally-focused philosophy. But the kicker is the falafel: just crispy enough and served in a fluffy pita with your choice of toppings that give traditional ingredients an inventive twist (think tomato cucumber salad with mint or red beets with lemon and thyme). If you're extra hungry, you can even add a side of sweet potato fries to your meal. Doesn't sound like your average gyro stand? It's not. With inspiration gathered from a number of countries and cuisines, the only way we can describe it is "falafel fusion." You might not expect it, but get ready for the delicious flavors to hit you like, well, a truck.

155 De Haro, SF. (415) 806-5422, libasf.com

SUNRISE DELI & CAFÉ

Nestled between Asian markets

in sleepy Outer Sunset, Sunrise Deli & Café has been around for three decades, always delivering food whose ingredients have never seen the inside of a freezer or plastic packaging. We believe the café's longevity must be due in part to the falafel, which arrives looking more like the cousin of a burrito than a taco. With Sunrise's version, eggplant and potatoes strain against the confines of lavash bread, with plenty of tahini and fresh tomatoes to balance all that carby goodness. Though the little balls of grain are always good, try to get them right out of the fryer, when they're piping hot, crunchy but not greasy, and delicious. But if you do stop here, plan accordingly. You'll want to arrive ravenous, or else risk quite the bellyache (because you won't be able to stop eating until this falafel is gone). Have a heftier appetite? Round out your order with other entrees, sandwiches, salads, and dips, which you can

enjoy at an inside table or take it all to go.

2115 Irving, SF. (415) 664-8210, sunrisedeli.net

THEATRE TOO CAFÉ

Waiting for falafel inside this Middle Eastern eatery is almost as enjoyable as eating it. The husband-and-wife owners trade quips and squabble lovingly as they prepare your gargantuan lavash wraps, adding a bit of levity along with greaseless chickpea balls and a blazingly spicy spread. (Expect even the "medium" spice to bring tears to your eyes.) If moving your meal seems too momentous a task, you can enjoy your falafel in the Internet loft or the more traditional seating area. Or, if you're feeling ambitious, take your food to go. With a huge sandwich and a drink that cost less than \$10, you should still have money left over for parking somewhere else. **SFBG**

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6 innovative ice creams

It's not just you. There really is an explosion of new places to get sweet, cold, creamy treats in the Bay Area. But why the new interest in this classic American dessert? Neil Gottlieb, founder of Three Twins in the Lower Haight, considers the trend the newest place the slow food movement is having an impact. "There's a renaissance of making ice cream the way it should be made — with fresh ingredients." Jake Godby, chef/owner of Humphry Slocombe, agrees. "Ice cream is the new cupcake," he said. But does that mean the market will become oversaturated soon? Mitchell's manager Linda Mitchell doubts it, explaining that people simply *love* ice cream — and have a seeming insatiable desire for new and interesting flavors. Plus, Godby adds, each specialty ice cream shop has its own niche. "We're all kind of different from each other, and we all get along," he said. After extensive testing (and just a few ice cream headaches), we've discovered six of our favorite flavors from both new and long-beloved creameries. Pinkberry who?

(Sarah C. Jiménez)

MEXICAN CHOCOLATE

You may scream for ice cream, but the yelling in my house came from my mother when I tried to nibble a block of Mexican baking chocolate: "That's not candy!" Bouncing off the walls, I begged to differ. Now Mitchell's, the family-run parlor that's been open more than 50 years, has turned the spiced chocolate of my childhood dreams into a bona fide creamy dessert, rich in flavor and accented with blasts of cinnamon. Not even Mom can argue.

Mitchell's, 688 San Jose, SF.
(415) 648-2300,
www.mitchellsicecream.com

SALTED CARAMEL

This orgasmic flavor is what inspires people to wait in tangled lines, even in the middle of a rainstorm. Is it the first lick, when salt puckers your taste buds, that's so enticing? Or the luscious sweetness of caramel that kicks in next? Or the pleasant surprise at the way the two meld into one perfect after-experience? It doesn't matter. Thanks to flavor combinations like these, Bi-Rite's ice cream, always made with organic dairy products from Straus Family Creamery, already feels like a San Francisco classic after only three years.

Bi-Rite Creamery, 3692 18th St., SF. (415) 626-5600,
www.biritecreamery.com

DOMAINE CARNEROS SORBET

Three Twins carries only eight flavors of its organic ice creams and sorbets at its tiny shop on Fillmore and Haight (and its several other locations, including one in Napa), so you never know what special flavors will be available. But if you can get the Domaine Carneros sorbet, made from unfermented pinot noir grapes, you won't want to miss it. The delicate hint of wine mixes with ripe bursts of tangy, tart berries for an unexpectedly balanced flavor, pleasing your child-like and 21+ palate alike. (If the sorbet's not available, you also can't go wrong with Lemon Cookie, a Three Twins staple flavor.)

Three Twins, 254 Fillmore, SF.
(415) ITS-TWIN,
www.threetwinsicecream.com

SAFFRON GINGER

Following the lead of spicemasters like Bombay Ice Cream, Mission District newcomer Xanath has turned the savory spice of saffron into a creamy, lush, and ginger-filled frozen



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ARLENE ROMANA

treat. The young, family-owned parlor also offers an array of organic ice creams and vegan sorbets, including options like coconut, strawberry, and peanut butter. And we love the staff, not only because they're extraordinarily friendly, but also because they let you try as many flavors as you like (before you inevitably settle on Saffron Ginger).

Xanath, 951 Valencia, SF.
(415) 648-8996

GOAT CHEESE

I'd like to thank the crazy person who first made goat cheese gelato. In the meantime, I'll just thank Holy Gelato!, the neighborhood shop that hosts this pungent, creamy party in your mouth. The quirky shop, featuring a picture of Darth Vader glaring at you from a heaping tub of gelato, makes sure you not only get an eyeful of eccentricity, but a mouthful of crazy flavors that'll have you skipping back for more. (For your best goat cheese pairing,

try an accompanying scoop of raspberry sorbet.)

Holy Gelato!, 1392 Ninth Ave., SF.
(415) 681-3061,
www.holygelato.com

BLUE BOTTLE VIETNAMESE COFFEE

Sure, Humphry Slocombe may have a reputation as the latest hipster trend (and it is). But for good reason: its Blue Bottle Vietnamese Coffee flavor is the most phenomenal thing to happen to ice cream and coffee since the two were first mixed together in ... who knows? The shop on Harrison and 23rd streets may be known for its way-out flavors, but it's the combination of some of the best coffee in the city infused into this simple yet complex ice cream that makes this flavor a hit. **SFBG**

Humphry Slocombe Ice Cream, 2790 Harrison, SF. (415) 550-6971,
www.humphryslocombe.com

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